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NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

Implications of a ROK Foreign Policy Initiative

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The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of the estimate:

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18 June 1973

SUBJECT: NIE 42/14.2-73: IMPLICATIONS OF A ROK FOREIGN POLICY INITIATIVE

PRÉCIS

The proposed South Korean initiative is designed to forestall a diplomatic setback at the United Nations this fall. In substance, it would bow to pressure in the UN for a debate with North Korea participating and would anticipate possible change in the UN role. In a more positive sense, it would open a longer range effort to achieve a *modus vivendi* on the Korean Peninsula based on new understandings among the powers concerned.

If ROK leaders do *not* proceed with the initiative, and if a further effort is made to postpone a General Assembly debate on Korea, the attempt would probably fail. There would be negative political consequences for the US as well as South Korea.

If the ROKs do proceed as planned, their initiative could lead to an eventual phasing out of the UN role in Korea, but this process need not endanger peace and stability there.

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Prospects for obtaining new, *formal* international guarantees to keep the peace in Korea would not be good. However, there would be scope for certain more limited moves by the powers that would reflect their interests and would contribute to stability -- diplomatic recognition of the two Koreas by the great powers, endorsement of the Korean DMZ as a de facto boundary, and bilateral understandings to limit arms supplies to the peninsula. In the main, however, peace and stability would tend to rest -- as it does today -- on the interests of the powers in avoiding conflict and in the actions they took on a bilateral basis to limit adventurous or provocative actions by their Korean clients.

If the UN machinery, particularly the UN Command, were phased out before the achievement of some new international undertakings, the ROK Government would become somewhat more demanding in its security relationships with the US. Seoul would want reaffirmation of the bilateral security treaty. It would be less complacent than before when talk of US force reductions in Korea was broached. It might be less receptive to the idea of reducing ROK ground forces. It would be increasingly sensitive to any move to cut promised ROK force modernization outlays, and it might even request new and larger modernization packages.

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THE ESTIMATE

I. THE ROK INITIATIVE

1. To meet what they perceive as a strong trend toward increased international acceptance of the North Korean regime, the leaders of South Korea are contemplating a major shift in foreign policy. Scheduled to be announced on 23 June, the new ROK line includes: acceptance of a UN General Assembly (UNGA) debate on the Korean issue (with North Korea participating together with the South); dissolution of the UN Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea (UNCURK) mechanism; and membership for North Korea in specialized UN organizations. ROK leaders are also expected to introduce at least the idea that both Koreas should enter the UN, accepting the likelihood that such a move would lead in time to dismantling the United Nations Command (UNC) structure in Korea in all its ramifications.

2. In a more positive sense, the South Koreans see their contemplated initiative as the beginning of a longer range effort to obtain formal Chinese and Soviet acceptance of ROK legitimacy, and formal North Korean promises of good behavior --- in effect, to achieve something approaching a *modus vivendi* on the peninsula. Seoul hopes to accomplish this without,

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at the same time, offering formal diplomatic recognition of the Pyongyang regime (that is, without sacrificing the emotional goal of Korean unification), and without accepting North Korea's demand for withdrawal of US forces.

3. The South Koreans hope to do all these things in close cooperation with the US in order to avoid any damage to their all-important bilateral relationship and to enlist US bargaining power in dealing with China, the USSR, and the international community generally. Indeed, if not assured of US support for their proposed initiative, ROK leaders would probably prefer to confine their maneuvers to little more than passive acceptance of the inevitability of an UNGA debate on Korea this fall. Having been encouraged by the US for some time to think beyond the immediate political/military requirements of their confrontation with North Korea, the ROK leadership would probably be puzzled and disappointed by any such evidence of US unwillingness to endorse their new strategy, at least in broad outline. Their displeasure would grow if Pyongyang subsequently stole a diplomatic march by surfacing its own conciliatory proposals before the General Assembly.

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II. LIKELY DEVELOPMENTS AT THE UNITED NATIONS

A. If the ROKs Do *Not* Proceed With Their Initiative

4. If South Korea, for whatever reason, attempts once more to try for a favorable UNGA vote on postponement of "the Korean item," it will probably fail. With the North-South dialog clearly stalled, ROK arguments of last year -- that the two parties were moving toward a new relationship on their own -- are now weak. Recognizing this, such old friends as Japan, Australia, and the UK would be less than enthusiastic lobbyists. North Korea, meanwhile, has increased its circle of supporters in New York. Overall, in the wake of the Indochina settlements, there is a pervasive desire in the General Assembly to air the Korean issue.

5. If Seoul and its allies nonetheless try to postpone and lose, there would be certain political costs. For the ROK: some discredit internationally; some domestic criticism; and a measure of US public and Congressional disapproval of South Korean inflexibility. For the ROK and US Governments, the most important loss might be in terms of reduced bargaining power in any subsequent negotiation with North Korea, China, and the USSR on new guarantees of security in Korea to replace the UN umbrella. Seoul and Washington might also sour relations with the UK and Japan to some extent if these countries had been active in the losing

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battle. In short, while hardly a disaster, a negative outcome at the UN this fall would give the appearance of ineptitude on the part of the ROK and US Governments while decreasing their leverage in any later dealings on Korean issues with the communist side.

B. If the ROKs *Do* Proceed With Their Initiative

6. From the ROK (and US) viewpoint, the *ideal* outcome at New York would be a debate in which South Korea appeared sufficiently flexible -- on the terms of debate, on North Korean participation, and on the future of UNCURK -- to forestall demand for prompt action on security-related issues -- the UNC and its peacekeeping role in South Korea. More likely, however, there will be pressures generated by the North Koreans and their allies for prompt termination of the UN's role in Korean peacekeeping. If such presentations are effective, the ROK and US representatives might have to respond with at least a vague commitment to ultimate dissolution of the UNC mechanism. Nonetheless, there would seem to be very little possibility that the North Koreans could marshal strong UN sentiment on such essentially bilateral issues as the US troop presence in South Korea and US military aid to South Korean forces.

7. Thus, it appears unlikely that implementation of the contemplated ROK initiative would result in any immediate or sharp setback to the

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cause of security and stability in Korea. Specifically, it would be recognized internationally that any generalized ROK or US commitment on the UNC issue would necessarily require a good deal of time to implement. Only the most radical third-world supporters of the North Korean cause would wish to dissolve precipitately the mechanism that helped maintain peace in Korea for 20 years. China and the USSR would almost certainly wish to avoid the risks inherent in any sudden breakup of the UN-sponsored security mechanism and would provide only modest support to the North Korean position.

III. PROBLEMS IN ACHIEVING NEW INTERNATIONAL GUARANTEES

8. The principal value of the UNC to the US at this point is that it provides a mechanism for maintaining the 1953 truce agreements. Its military command functions, while convenient and politically advantageous to the US, could be replaced in practical effect by purely bilateral ROK-US arrangements. Its value in the use of Japanese bases is to strengthen the legal basis for US military operations from Japan in certain Korean contingencies. But Japanese attitudes on such matters have come increasingly to depend primarily on the specific context of any such Korean emergency and, more important, on the prevailing political climate in Tokyo.

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9. Thus, the problem for the US as the UN inevitably moves toward divesting itself of the Korean problem is to supplant the UNC mechanism with other guarantees designed to maintain North-South peace.

A. Security Council Undertakings

10. The UNC operates under the authority of a 1950 Security Council resolution; this authority has never been challenged in the Council. It would be logical -- especially now that Peking is on the Council -- to look to this body for the sort of undertaking that might help compensate for the loss of the UNC mechanism. For example, the Security Council might provide a legally useful endorsement of the Korean DMZ as a de facto North-South boundary -- until unification occurs. Such action seems unlikely, however, at least in the near term, since neither China nor the USSR would want to offend the North Koreans by acting to reinforce rather than remove UN involvement in Korean affairs.

B. Great-Power Guarantees

11. There may be somewhat greater scope for effective action in arrangements among the powers outside the UN context. Such arrangements, if potentially offensive to either of the Korean parties, need not be trumpeted abroad and, of course, need not be formalized.

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12. *China* entertains relatively cordial relations with North Korea at this time. Because of its security concerns regarding the USSR, China's overriding interest is to keep Korea from becoming an area of military contention between its client in Pyongyang and the US client in Seoul. But China also wishes to maintain its superior position of influence in Pyongyang vis-a-vis the Russians, hence Peking feels compelled to support North Korean objectives in the UN and in the peninsula to some extent. There is also a shared Chinese-North Korean interest in minimizing Japanese influence in both Koreas. Even if China were open to a formalization of the status quo in Korea, it could not get out ahead of the North Koreans on this issue.

13. *The USSR* has similar interests and attitudes. Though its relationship with the North Korean regime is comparatively cool, it is for this reason that Moscow must be even more cautious than Peking in avoiding actions offensive to Pyongyang. A complicating factor in the Soviet calculus on Korea is the analogy to Germany; Moscow does not favor the propagation of unification sentiment in divided states, much less formal endorsement of unification formulas however vague. Chinese concepts, of course, are conditioned by contrasting needs regarding the Taiwan situation. All other things being equal, therefore, the Russians are probably more comfortable with the Korean status quo than are the Chinese.

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14. *Japan* wants stability in Korea but tends to weigh measures proposed to achieve it against the potential for disturbing the perpetuation of a friendly conservative leadership in Seoul. The South Korean anticommunist buffer, complete with US troops and planes, is strategically comforting to the Japanese leadership. They prefer the status quo in the South to any series of moves likely to offer opportunities for the growth of Chinese or Soviet influence in Seoul. Japan, however, shows no sign of moving toward a security role in the nearby peninsula, in part because Tokyo understands the harsh reaction likely to emanate from the Korean parties as well as from China and Russia.

15. Japan obviously must think beyond the withdrawal of the US military presence from South Korea to a period when greater self-reliance may be required. It is evident, at this point at least, that Tokyo's leaders prefer to evade this potential problem and to continue instead to encourage maintenance of a strong US military presence in the South.

16. To summarize, all three of the Northeast Asian Powers appear reasonably satisfied with the development of an atmosphere of accommodation between the two Koreas over the past year or two. But none seems particularly anxious to seek any speedup in the process or to involve itself

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in any sort of formal security guarantee should the UNC mechanism be phased out. The priority need for all three powers is the absence of the threat of armed conflict in Korea; this requirement might in fact predispose these powers toward a firmer peacekeeping structure. China and the USSR, however, have a countervailing need to avoid offending the Pyongyang regime. Japan is tugged by its concern with the preservation of a congenial leadership in Seoul. So long as the threat to continued peace in the peninsula remains at low levels, therefore, the incentives for bold new departures on the part of the powers interested in Korea will remain rather modest.

17. This is not to say that North Korea retains an absolute veto on its partners' actions nor that Pyongyang itself may not see merit in certain moves to firm up the "Two Koreas" concept and pursue a genuine accommodation. For example, because it wishes to enhance its international status and its economic development, North Korea strongly desires full diplomatic relations with Japan and some sort of contact with the US. South Korea, for its part, has been soliciting Soviet and Chinese interest in accepting the legitimacy of the Seoul government. It is possible, then, to envisage an understanding among the four major powers -- the US, Japan, China, and the USSR -- whereby the two Koreas are accorded diplomatic recognition by all of them. This would amount to acceptance of the legitimacy

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of both and imply acceptance of a divided Korea for the indefinite future. Lip service might still have to be paid to the unification idea, however, since it is part of the ideology of both Koreas.

18. Another possibility might be issuance of a joint statement -- outside the objectionable (to Pyongyang) UN context -- perhaps in the form of endorsing a North-South renunciation-of-force agreement which would de facto accept the DMZ. There are, in addition, such areas as arms supply in which the powers might quietly (and probably on a bilateral rather than multilateral basis) reach limitation agreements without concurrence of their clients. It is also possible that if relations between the two Koreas went well in these new circumstances, they would themselves be disposed to arrangements for mutual force reductions. We note, however, that verification of any such reductions in North Korea would involve serious and complicated problems.

IV. POSSIBLE PROBLEMS IN UNITED STATES RELATIONS WITH THE ROK

19. The South Korean leadership is obviously ready to venture into new international waters, at the UN and in dealings with the communist world. Nonetheless, Seoul will require continuing assurances of US support for basic ROK security needs and, less urgently perhaps, periodic

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acknowledgement of its self-image as the most loyal US ally in East Asia. Seoul wants to become more "independent" of the US, but surrounded by states it mistrusts (including Japan), South Korea feels a need to re-insure with Washington for an indefinite period. In these circumstances, the US will retain a significant measure of influence in Seoul over the next several years.

20. If the UNC were phased out before the achievement of some new international guarantees, the ROK Government would become somewhat more demanding in its security relationships with the US. Seoul would want reaffirmation of the bilateral security treaty. It would be less complacent than before when talk of US force reductions in Korea was broached. It might be less receptive to the idea of reducing ROK ground forces; it would be increasingly sensitive to any move to cut promised ROK force modernization outlays; and it might even request new and larger modernization packages. South Korea's general concerns would be heightened by greater uncertainty over the utility of the Japanese base structure.

21. It is possible that this portrayal of ROK attitudes is somewhat overdrawn. The South Koreans are quite sophisticated in security matters and often adopt worried poses mainly to stimulate the flow of US funds

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and equipment. There is little doubt, however, that they would do so in the posited situation; and the burden of US negotiators in Seoul may become greater than in recent years.

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22. The prospect for stabilization in the Korean Peninsula is good. The US link will remain most valuable to Seoul, but could be supplemented in time by a degree of acceptance by Peking and Moscow, and by developments in North-South relations tending to enhance the climate of normalization. It may be possible in time -- barring serious great-power flareups in Northeast Asia or domestic upheavals in either Korea -- to find the two regimes focussed on their economic and political competitions, with military problems largely relegated to the background.

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